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BRIEFINGS, APRIL 2007

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11. (U). Summary: This is the South African Environment, Science and Technology newsletter, April 2007, Volume 2, Number 1, prepared by the U.S. Embassy Pretoria, South Africa.

Topics of the newsletter:

- SA Farmers Reluctant to Plant GMO Sugar Cane
- South African Giant Retailers Go Green
- Ministry Sells Marine Patrol Vessel at Well-Below Market Value
- Environmental Minister Refutes Inertia Claims Regarding Climate Change
- Revised EIA Regulations Benefit Development Projects

End Summary.

SA FARMERS RELUCTANT TO PLANT GMO SUGAR CANE

12. (U) South Africa is one of the top ten in sugar exporting countries in the world, producing about 2.5 million tons of sugar per year, half of which is exported. South African Cane Growers Association spokesperson Adrian Wynn said recently that local sugar cane farmers remain sensitive about genetically modified (GM) sugar, and are reluctant to plant it. According to Wynn, the South African Sugar Research Institute, which has been conducting GM research since 1993, has already developed insect repellent and herbicide-resistant cane, and an increased sucrose-yielding strain. Wynn said that the local industry will continue to refrain from planting GM sugar cane for commercial use, despite the benefits, until world opinion changes.

SOUTH AFRICAN GIANT RETAILERS GO GREEN

13. (U) Two South African supermarket retailers announced new climate change/carbon foot print reduction programs. Pick n' Pay Stores plan to become the first local retailer to disclose their carbon dioxide emissions, while Woolworths plans to reduce its "relative carbon footprints" by 30 percent in the next five years. Pick n' Pay announced that it would also stock only fish that had been managed in a sustainable way, such as hake, snoek and tuna. Woolworths CEO Simon Sussman said they would cut electricity consumption and transportation emissions by 30 and 20 percent, respectively.

MINISTRY SELLS MARINE PATROL VESSEL AT WELL-BELOW MARKET VALUE

14. (U) The Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism's (DEAT) Marine Coastal Management (MCM) Division sold their 50-meter marine patrol vessel "Eagle Star" in November 2006 at well below market value, raising concerns regarding corruption and/ or incompetence. MCM sold the Eagle Star for \$42,000 through an auction process in which only two bidders participated. When the vessel was sold, its fuel tanks held diesel valued at \$31,900. The new owner, Rudolf Van Der Werf, immediately resold that fuel. Van Der Werf stated that he intended to lease the vessel to the government of Mozambique. Recent refits to the "Eagle Star" cost the taxpayers \$486,000. DEAT spokesperson Blessing Manale said the sale had stunned senior government officials and opposition party members.

15. (U) DEAT has announced the appointment of an external auditor to investigate how the auction was conducted, including how it was advertised, the choice of the auctioneers and how the final sale price had been determined. Manale said MCM Deputy Director General Monde Mayekiso had been given a mandate from DEAT to sell the vessel because it was considered obsolete and too expensive to keep. Manale noted that Mayekiso did not set a minimum price for the vessel prior to the auction because he feared driving away potential bidders. The MCM Finance Chief has allegedly conceded the sale price was too low, blaming the two auction houses that conducted the sale. Replying to parliamentary questions, DEAT Minister Marthinus Van Schalkwyk acknowledged that DEAT had spent considerable sums to convert the vessel from a fishing trawler to a marine patrol training ship, and noted that the vessel had been used by MCM for over four years. The Democratic Alliance, an opposition political party, noted that the 2003 value of the vessel was \$1.1 million, and that DEAT had subsequently revamped the vessel and fitted with vessel-monitoring systems, radar, IT and satellite facilities. ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTER REFUTES INERTIA CLAIMS REGARDING CLIMATE CHANGE

16. (U) The Democratic Alliance (DA), South African opposition political party, accused Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) Marthinus Van Schalkwyk of inertia in dealing with climate change. DA environmental spokesman Rafeek Shah claimed that

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although Van Schalkwyk spends a great deal of time speaking at international forums about the need for serious and immediate action against climate change, he had "dropped the ball" in South Africa. Shah stated that DEAT had not produced anything concrete that mitigated or minimized climate change impact, in spite of the Intergovernmental Panel of Climate Change's (IPCC) recent warnings regarding potentially severe climate change impacts on South Africa.

Minister Van Schalkwyk's office responded to the DA allegations stating that DEAT had produced a "climate roadmap". This "road map" sets forth a series of inter-ministerial climate change intervention programs, such as the long-term mitigation scenario process. A panel of DEAT researchers is also analyzing the IPCC assessment report. The Minister's spokesman commented that the Department of Agriculture is also developing a climate change response plan, in coordination with DEAT. The Minister's office further noted that the Department of Minerals and Energy (DME) is working towards full implementation of South Africa's national energy efficiency accord.

REVISED EIA REGULATIONS BENEFIT DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

17. (U) In 2006 DEAT sought public comments on the 1997 Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations. Based upon these comments, DEAT has proposed a set of revised EIA regulations addressing technical and legal errors, eliminating minor procedures, and providing definitions and time frames for appeals. South African CEO Nils Flaaten noted that the proposed amendments will provide a positive impetus to the South African investment climate. The Cape Town Regional Chamber of Commerce also welcomed the proposed amendments, noting that they would simplify the EIA process. The Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism Marthinus Schalkwyk said that economic development, investment and conservation need not be opposing end goals. There must be a balance between economic development and conservation. The amendment process is expected to be completed by the end of July.

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